

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PANAMA 03803 261809Z
ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 SP-02 PM-04 L-03 INR-07 H-01
PRS-01 SAB-02 /046 W
-----261838Z 059843 /41
R 261730Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2078

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 3803

STADIS//////////

DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR AMBASSADOR JORDEN

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: MILI, MASS, PFOR, PN
SUBJECT: NATIONAL GUARD-U.S. MILITARY RELATIONS

REF: PANAMA 3478

1. DURING THE PAST FEW WEEKS, RELATIONS BETWEEN THE
PANAMANIAN NATIONAL GUARD (GN) AND U.S. MILITARY GROUP
PANAMA HAVE GROUND TO A VIRTUAL HALT.

2. THE GN WERE NOTALY COOPERATIVE WITH MILGROUP
DURING THEIR OPERATION "OH, WHAT FEAR" EARLIER THIS
MONTH (REFTEL). SINCE THEN, NORMAL DAILY WORKING
RELATIONS AND CONTACTS BETWEEN GN AND MILGROUP STAFF
HAVE DWINDLED TO ALMOST NOTHING.

3. THE U.S. ARMED FORCES DAY RECEPTION AT AMBASSADOR'S
RESIDENCE MAY 21 WAS WELL-ATTENDED BY U.S. MILITARY
FROM CANAL AND FOREIGN ATTACHE CORPS.BUT THERE
WAS A TOTAL BOYCOTT BY THE VERY SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER
OF GN MEMBERS AND GOP OFFICIALS INVITED--NOT ONE GN
ATTENDED, AND ONLY ONE OHTER RELATIVELY MINOR GOP OFFICIAL
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CAME (THE LATTER APPARENTLY STRICTLY FOR PERSONAL
REASONS).

4. THIS WAS OBVIOUSLY ORCHESTRATED AND OFFICIALLY
DIRECTED. ONE LOWER-RANKING GN OFFICER WHOSE ATTENDANCE
(AND INDULGENCE) AT EVERY POSSIBLE SOCIAL FUNCTIONSIS
NOTORIOUS FIRST ADVISED MILGROUP HE WOULD ATTEND, THEN

SAID HE WAS NOT SURE, THEN BEGGED OFF. MOST OF THOSE INVITED JUST DID NOT RESPOND AT ALL.

5. THE REASONS FOR THIS SITUATION ARE STILL LARGELY SPECULATIVE ON OUR PART. IT EVIDENTLY GOES DEEPER THAN THE KNOWN STANDING INSTRUCTIONS THAT THE GN KEEP THE U.S. MILITARY AT ARM'S LENGTH IN PUBLIC TO AVOID "GRINGO-LOVER" CHARGES FROM THE DOMESTIC LEFT. IF THE CURRENT NEGOTIATING ROUND WERE GOING BADLY, THIS MIGHT ACCOUNT FOR IT. BUT ALL SIGNS WE HAVE SUGGEST THAT THOSE IN GN AND GOP IN A POSITION TO KNOW THINK THE ROUND IS GOING WELL.

6. THE RECENT PUBLIC OUTCRY OVER ALLEGED STATEMENTS BY USCINCSO BEFORE THE NEGOTIATING ROUND IS PROBABLY A CONTRIBUTORY FACTOR. MANY GN OFFICERS HAVE APPEARED PRIVATELY EMBARRASSED BY MEDIA EXCESSES, BUT THE POTENTIAL FOR LOCAL EMBARRASSMENT FROM A TOO-VISIBLE GN ASSOCIATION WITH THE U.S. MILITARY IS INDISPUTABLY GREATER THAN NORMAL DUE TO THAT FLAP.

7. HOWEVER, WE ARE INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT THE CURRENT MORIBUND STATE OF OUR MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND ARREARAGES PROBLEM ARE SIGNIFICANT CAUSATIVE FACTORS IN THE RECENT COOLING. LAST JANUARY, CERTAIN FMS CREDITS WERE DISCUSSED WITH THE GN. FOR SOME TIME, THEY HAVE SOUGHT TO ACQUIRE TWO LCM'S WHICH THEY KNOW ARE IN THE CANAL ZONE BUT NOT IN USE. THEY HAVE HEARD NOTHING BUT SILENCE.
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8. WHATEVER THE REASONS, THE FACT IS THAT OUR MILITARY RELATIONS WITH THE GN ARE AT THIS TIME AT A VERY LOW EBB. WE WILL ADVISE IF THE SITUATION THAWS OUT--BUT FRANKLY HAVE LITTLE HOPE OF THIS HAPPENING SOON UNLESS WE HAVE SOME POSITIVE ACTIONS ON OUTSTANDING FMS AND RELATED ITEMS AS A LEVER TO PRY THE GN BACK OUT OF ITS SHELL.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MILITARY TRAINING, NATIONAL GUARD, MILITARY EXERCISES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 26-May-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 22 May 2009
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977PANAMA03803
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770188-0916
Format: TEL
From: PANAMA
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770514/aaaaalzu.tel
Line Count: 107
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: d9673289-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: STADIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: STADIS
Reference: 77 PANAMA 3478
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2355841
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: NATIONAL GUARD-U.S. MILITARY RELATIONS
TAGS: MILI, MASS, PFOR, PN, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/d9673289-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009